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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet is the first of a series aimed at helping college and high school teachers incorporate facts pertaining to Inner Asia into their courses. Written in a narrative style, the pamphlet defines Inner Asia as a "cultural concept," part of the Eurasian continent lying outside the boundaries of Europe, the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Its climate, which is colder and drier than that of surrounding countries, does not favor agriculture. Of its four natural vegetation regions (tundra, forest, desert, steppe), the steppe has provided most of Inner Asia's useful resources and a link to contact with other civilizations. Hardy Inner Asian horses allowed the natives to develop superior war-faring cavalries and military strength. The Mongolian area of the steppe belt was a convenient base for attacks on China. Within Inner Asia political unity was never complete, although communication and travel between the vegetation regions was not difficult. Personal nomadism and limited production of its most important commodity, the horse, made Inner Asia politically weak in the pre-modern age. Native groups living near its boundaries often were converted to the more "civilized" ways of neighboring countries. The author points out that "civilized" and "barbarian" are subjective terms relative to the cultures which use them. An annotated bibliography of 17 books is included. (AV)

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TEACHING AIDS FOR THE STUDY OF INNER ASIA

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NO. 1

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WHAT IS INNER ASIA?

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TEACHING AIDS FOR THE STUDY OF INNER ASIA

No. 1 Denis Sinor, What is Inner Asia? (1975)

No. 2 Turrell V. Wylie, Tibet's Role in Inner Asia (1975)

The Teaching Aids published in this series do not necessarily contain the results of original research. They are prepared and published for the purpose of helping non-specialized college and high school teachers to incorporate Inner Asian topics into their courses.

Offers of collaboration, suggestions for topics, are welcome and should be addressed to Professor Denis Sinor, Director, Asian Studies Research Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This pamphlet, first of a series aimed at helping interested college and high school teachers to incorporate into their courses facts pertaining to Inner Asia, has no other aim but to define this historical-cultural concept. Specific chapters of Inner Asian history and selected topics concerning aspects of the civilization of the area will constitute the subjects of suceeding pamphlets.

Within the physical and cultural framework of Inner Asia, Tibet constitutes an enclave with considerable autonomy. For this reason, and also because of my own lack of expertise, Tibet has not been dealt with in the pages that follow. A separate teaching aid (No. 2 of this series) will be devoted in its entirety to Tibet.

Unless they coincide with clearly defined physical boundaries--as is the case, for instance, with Australia--the borders of a cultural area can rarely be established with ease and accuracy. The problem lies to some extent with the highly subjective and often purely emotional criteria by which a civilization is defined. Scores of examples may be observed in our daily life. Thus we hear about the "free world" while no attempt is made to define what freedom may mean to human beings with a historical background different from our own. If there is a "free world" then, presumably, there must exist also a world "not free," and the differentiation is contingent on an ill-defined, emotionally charged term, "freedom." Humanity has been divided according to languages, races, or religions, and in more recent times and in present-day practice we speak of nations and classify individuals according to their passports. Thus, in practice five Germans--one each from respectively the German Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic, Austria, Switzerland, and the U.S.A.--will be classified into five different categories, while an Italian, a German, a Negro, an Irishman, and

a Mexican will be considered "American," if each of them holds a passport issued by the Department of State. It should be noted that by speaking of five Germans, I considered language the decisive criterion of classification, for it is certainly true that the historical traditions which over the centuries contributed to the formation of a German, an Austrian, or a Swiss are in many respects vastly different from each other.

The attribute or group of attributes by virtue of which we form peoples into a class must consist of the common essential qualities. Yet what is essential to one is not for the other. For a geographer, as for most people with common sense, the inclusion into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of the two Mediterranean arch-enemies, Greece and Turkey, will seem nonsensical. For politicians who have not yet discovered that Alice in Wonderland was fiction, it seemed to have been the logical step in the creation of a human community defined on the basis of a single attribute--that of its opposition to the Soviet Union. It is a well-known rule of logic that classifications made on the basis of a single attri-

bute are artificial and of limited use. To be a coherent, organic unit, a cultural area must encompass peoples with the greatest number of points of mutual resemblance and, also, the fewest points of resemblance to members of other cultural areas. Thus, no cultural area can be defined without reference to others.

The problem is not one that has only recently emerged. Europe and Asia are themselves correlative terms neither of which can be understood in its reality without reference to the other. The division of the old world into Asia, Europe, and Africa predates Herodotus (5th C. B.C.), who was already puzzled by the seeming illogicality of such division and could not conceive "why three names...should ever have been given to a tract which is in reality one." (Book IV, 45)

The impossibility of drawing any clear dividing line between Europe and Asia rests to some extent on the fact that the latter term is not autochthonous in origin, i.e., until recently it was not used by the Asians themselves. Quite understandably no group solidarity existed between peoples living on a tract

of land the unity of which was not perceived. The slow emergence of the European concept--for a long time closely associated with Christendom--brought about the gradual chrystallization in European minds of the concept Asia. The geographical delimitation of that continent is purely conventional and, even today, is subject to fluctuations. Very few Americans would conceive of Israel as an Asian state.

The Eurasian continent is a geographical entity, a huge continuous landmass stretching for thousands of miles both in east-west and in north-south directions. Well over sixty percent of the world's population lives on it. On its fringes grew and developed the great sedentary civilizations--such as Europe in the west and China in the east--whose attributes are sufficiently numerous to permit easy identification. The definition of some other cultural areas is more difficult to determine; for example the areas of Islamic and Indian culture overlap and lead to conflicts, some of which we have witnessed. And in the center of this continent lies a cultural area with which we are here particularly concerned: Inner Asia. The foregoing remarks had no other purpose

but to adumbrate some of the difficulties inherent in almost any attempt at defining in concrete geographical terms the boundaries of a cultural area.

Inner Asia is, essentially, a cultural concept. It is that part of the Eurasian continent that lies outside the boundaries of Europe, the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Each of these sedentary civilizations is a unique combination of features, some of which may appear in more than one of them. Yet an association of various components, cultural and linguistic, molded by a unique historical process and greatly influenced by natural environment made each of these cultural spheres different from the others. The same may be said of Inner Asia but in this case the typical features are more difficult to pinpoint. Here more than in the case of the sedentary civilizations the definition of the area at any given point in time can only be given by reference to the bordering civilizations.

A cursory glance at any map of Eurasia will show that the major civilizations developed on the periphery of the great landmass, while the evolution of the

heartland of the continent remained slow. It would seem that differentiation on a larger scale did not start before the end of the Upper Paleolithic period during which a fairly uniform belt of civilization stretched from what was to become Europe to what was to become China. From the dawn of recorded history the nuclei of future settled civilizations asserted their own identity and defined their own, distinct personalities largely by contrasting them with those of Inner Asia. Whether in Greece, China, or Iran, to give inner cohesion to the group, the concept of the Civilized was developed to contrast with that of the Barbarian,setting the two into largely fictitious opposition and comparing the would-be superiority of the former with the alleged inferiority of the latter.

Inner Asia, the heartland of the Eurasian continent, differs in its climate from the littorals. To put it in very simple terms, it is colder and drier.

The very size of Inner Asia excludes climatic homogeneity, but every part of it has what is called a "continental climate," characterized by cold winters and hot summers. The arctic littoral which consti-

tutes the only natural boundary of Inner Asia and the immense marshes of northern Siberia provide very little moisture to the air as, because of the intense cold, they are either frozen or produce but slight evaporation. The Central Mountain Barrier--extending from the Hindukush and the Pamir, along the Himalayas to the Tienshan--obstructs the path of rains coming from the south, and the oceans lying east and west of Inner Asia are far too distant to provide substantial moisture.

The climate's unavoidable effect on the ecology created conditions which--put in simplistic terms--do not favor agriculture. To be sure, in suitable and relatively small areas agriculture has been and is being practised but it has played only a marginal role in the economy of the region. The vast stretches of the steppe are favorable to extensive animal husbandry which has remained the most characteristic occupation of Inner Asian peoples until modern times.

Inner Asia may be divided into four natural vegetation regions stretching from east to west across the Eurasian continent. The frozen marshes known as the tundra constitute the northernmost belt.

Southwards, the vast forest belt is itself divided into a northern zone of coniferous trees and a southern tract dominated by mixed, and further south, by deciduous forests. This vast belt, extending over some six thousand miles from Finland to the Pacific constitutes a timber reserve unparalleled in the world. This forest zone is often referred to by its Russian name, taiga, although the term originally applies only to the coniferous forest. The southern margin of the forest belt constitutes a transitional zone known as the wooded steppe, suitable for cultivation because of the quality of its soil (black earth) and the relatively temperate, continental climate which it enjoys. Compared to the width of the forest zone, the steppe of grassland constitutes a relatively narrow belt which stretches from Hungary to the Great Wall of China. The mostly chestnut colored soil of the steppe does not favor agriculture but is suitable for grass. The temperate continental climate ensures sufficient precipitation to make this region an ideal grazing ground. Further south the steppes often merge into desert regions, not quite devoid of vegetation, but unable to sustain even semi-permanent human settlements.

Of the four natural regions of Central Eurasia just mentioned only one, the steppe, can support a polity of some sophistication and power. The natural conditions prevailing in the three other zones--the arctic tundra, the forest region, and the desert--do not allow the formation of powerful states, as none of them can provide food for a population of a density sufficient to muster the political power necessary to face external forces.

The limited hunting and reindeer breeding that characterize the production of the tundra can ensure subsistence-level existence of its inhabitants only as long as they live dispersed over vast territories.

As the desert could never support any permanent population it played no major role in the history of Inner Asia.

The economic resources of the forest region, the taiga, can support a hunter-fisher-gatherer population with relative ease. Perhaps more important from our present point of view is that it is the principal, almost exclusive producer of fur, a commodity much in demand by other civilizations. The routes of the fur trade crossed natural and political boundaries and made available to the hunters

raw materials and manufactured goods which they themselves could not produce. However, since a hunting economy is basically predatory and cannot serve as the economic basis for high-density populations, the hunters could never conglomerate to form a state. The taiga has often been described as impenetrable, a formidable obstacle to communication. Nothing could be further from the truth. The hunter not only moved with perfect ease through its thickets, he could also make use of waterways, these super highways of the pre-modern age. Although the principal rivers of Siberia flow from the south to the north, their confluents, when not frozen, constitute an almost continuous east-west waterway. The watersheds are not very elevated and the distances between different systems are so short that portage has never posed a serious problem. In less than one century after the conquest of Kazan in 1552, the Russians stood on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The fourth region, the steppe, constitutes the key to the understanding of Inner Asian history. It was this vast pasture that provided the only asset the populations of Inner Asia could rely on in their continuous confrontation with the surrounding, sedentary civilizations. Of course, I refer to the horse

and to the cavalry tactics and strategy based on its large-scale use. In the steppe, cattle breeding--whether it be horned cattle, camel, sheep, goat or horse--was always extensive. To ensure economic seif-sufficiency, the Inner Asian horse breeders had to remain dispersed, but, unlike the inhabitants of the tundra and the taiga, they could congregate with great speed and could stay together for relatively long periods of time. In other words, the population-carrying capacity of the steppe within a fixed area is superior to that of either the tundra or the forest. The environment could and did allow the creation of strongly centralized states and was able to maintain such political superstructure for as long as the community could complement its basic production with commodities obtained from other, mostly agricultural regions. In Owen Lattimore's words, steppe life

> "is based on an economy which is capable of being entirely self-sufficient. Its own resources provide the essentials of food, housing, clothing and transport, even fuel (from cattle dung). Nor does it prevent the mining and working of metals on a small scale, as is known from archaeological evidence. The steppe-nomad can withdraw into the steppe if he needs to, and remain completely out of contact with other

> societies. He can; but so rarely does he so that this pure condition of nomadic life can fairly be called hypothetical. For every historical level of which we have any knowledge there is evidence that exchange of some kind, through trade or tribute, has been important in steppe-nomad life."[1]

If the steppe-based state no longer enjoyed the quasi-autarchy of a small-scale pastoralist, tribal organization, it had the possibility of compensating for any deficiency either by trade or by military means Horse breeding on a large scale provided the most essential tools of warfare.

The key role of the horse in the civilization of Inner Asia is universally recognized. Indeed, the picture of the mounted archer has come to symbolize, and rightly so, the force that created some of the greatest, if not the most lasting, states known to history. Until firearms came to dominate warfare, a well-disciplined, well-led Inner Asian cavalry force--provided it was sufficiently large and disposed of an important reserve of mounts--was virtually invincible

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[1] "The Geographical Factor in Mongol History," The Geographical Journal 91 (1938), reprinted in Studies in Frontier History. Collected Papers 1928-1958, (Oxford University Press, 1962), 241-258, p. 253.

by armies of sedentary populations. The annals of the Mongol Yüan dynasty of China (1279-1368) could reasonably state: "Yüan arose in the northern areas. By nature they are good at riding and archery. Therefore they took possession of the world through this advantage of bows and horse."

The quality of the Inner Asian breeds and, in particular, their resistance to climatic extremes and their hardiness made them superior to any other warfaring horse, from Scythian times to World War II. Rather unattractive to our eyes, the typical Inner Asian horse is under the average height, has a long and shaggy coat, thick neck and legs, and a large head. These horses possess wonderful powers of endurance and can remain out in the open in extreme cold. They are capable of digging their food out from under the snow and, in case of need, can surive on twigs, tree bark, or any other vegetal substance.

The first recorded compliment on the Inner Asian horse goes back to Herodotus. Describing the campaigns of Darius I (521-486 B.C.), the Achamaenid king of Persia, against the Scythians he stated (Histories IV, 127): "In these combats the Scythian horse always put to flight the horse of the enemy." In the second century B.C., speaking of the Hsiung-nu who created a

powerful empire in Mongolia, a Chinese source remarks: "...the territory of the Hsiung-nu and the skill it demands are different from those in China. In climbing up and down mountains and crossing ravines and mountain torrents, the horses of China cannot compare with those of the Hsiung-nu." When, in 1245, the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini made preparations for his pioneering journey to Mongolia, the inhabitants of Kiev, more familiar with conditions there, warned him that were he to continue his journey with the horses he then had "they would all die, for the snow was deep and they would not know how to dig up grass from under the snow like the Tartar horses, nor would he be able to find anything else for them to eat since the Tartars have neither straw nor hay nor fodder."

The military power of the steppe nations rested not only on the excellence of their mounts and the military skill of their soldiers, but also on the number of the horses the latter could count upon. The steppe could produce horses in quantities far in excess of the domestic needs. The surplus could be used to obtain, either by barter or through war, goods not produced within the pastoral economic system. In the first case the horses were exchanged for other commodities through peaceful

trade, in the second, their military potential was used to obtain by force what could not be gotten otherwise. It was one of the tragic mistakes of traditional Chinese policy towards the northern and western Barbarian--i.e., towards the peoples of Inner Asia--to imagine that by denying him trade and thereby further impoverishing the already poor, the menace he represented along the border would be reduced. Quite to the contrary, it was this centuries-old policy of "containment" that must be considered the direct cause of most Inner Asian invasions of China.

On the western and southern frontiers of Inner Asia the conflicts were less prolonged and less acute. On a purely speculative basis one might attribute this to political as well as to environmental causes. Among the first could be counted the relative flexibility of Iranian and European political thinking. While, in practice, many concessions had to be made by the Chinese to the realities of power and to the vanity of their foreign partners or opponents, the basic pretension to universal sovereignty was never completely buried and remained the basis of Chinese foreign policy. It is probably safe to say that with the exception of some

mainly Anglo-Saxon political behavior of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European, Iranian, and Indian attitudes were much more flexible and much less self-righteous.

The environment was probably an even more important factor in determining the frequency and force of the collisions between Inner Asia and the civilizations that surround it. The range of activity and the very size of the great cavalry forces of Inner Asia were limited by the carrying capacity of the grazing grounds they could use. In the whole steppe-belt no pasture land is as favorable to horse breeding as Mongolia which--and this is an important point--was a convenient base for powerful attacks on China. While on the eastern borders of Inner Asia the grass land brought the mounted archer within striking distance of Chinese political centers, in the west the Balkan peninsula served as an effective glacis in the protection of Byzantium. To be sure, cavalry forces could and did reach the walls of Constantinople, but their size could not compare with those launched against the great cities of northern China and decisive victory was out of their reach. The logistic problems presented could be compared to those faced by a naval power attempting to conquer a landlocked country.

If the political outreach of Inner Asia was limited by the logistic imperatives commanding the effective use of its cavalry, its internal cohesion was favored by geographical factors. The three natural zones--tundra, taiga, steppe--lie athwart the Eurasian continent, constituting three continuous broad belts from east to west. Each of them is a fairly homogenous ecological unit within which man, adapting himself to the natural conditions which he does not attempt to alter, can move freely. In theory there is nothing to prevent an experienced hunter-fisher from mounting a reindeer and riding it from Kamchatka to Sweden. The wooded steppe and the steppe itself permitted the fastest travel known to man before the building of the railways. Armies and peoples could move fast over considerable distances unhampered by natural obstacles or by their own, sedentary habits. When the need and the will to create it was there, the abundance and the quality of the horses allowed the organization of a relay system far superior to that of the Romans or any other state at any other time.

Communication between the various natural regions has always been easy. The division between steppe and forest is made less harsh by the existence of the wooded zone and the rivers facilitate travel and commercial or

cultural interchange between the three major ecological units. The cultural cleavage between steppe and forest dwellers did not always and necessarily entail political separation.

A common script, the greatest cohesive force of any given civilization, has not linked the various nations and peoples of Inner Asia until recent times. Whether these have ever developed a consciousness of their affinities is a moot point. There is some evidence to the effect that a feeling of community must have evolved at least among the various peoples of the steppe referred to as "the peoples living under felt tents," or elsewhere as "the people who live by drawing the bow." Yet Inner Asia has never known complete political unification. The most successful attempts were those of the Mongols in the thirteenth and of the Russians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It would seem that in the cauldron of Inner Asia the various racial, ethnic, social,and linguistic units were floating freely, initially kept together not so much by a cohesive force of their own making but rather by outside pressure. At the risk of overstretching the metaphor I would suggest that the cauldron referred to above was cast by the encircling civilizations.

The cultural cleavage separating Inner Asia from the high civilizations is to a great extent, although not exclusively, the result of ecological factors. Within the boundaries of Inner Asia the tripartite ecology (tundra, taiga, steppe) did not prevent a certain cultural unification, characterized by distinctive features of a great variety. Perhaps the most important among these is the interrelatedness of the Inner Asian languages which can be subdivided into five principal groups: Finno-Ugric, Samoyed (the two together called Uralic), Turkic, Mongol, and Tunguz (the three together called Altaic). The extent and the nature of the interrelatedness of these groups is subject to discussion but its existence has been established beyond reasonable doubt. There is a strong presumption for explaining the similarities and dissimilarities that exist between the various Altaic languages by the prolonged symbiosis of their speakers. It could well be that some, if not all, of the common features of, say, Turkic, Mongol, and Tunguz are not the remnants of a Proto-Altaic language their common ancestors may at one time have spoken, but rather resulted from a convergent development determined by millennial intermingling. The basic cultural uniformity of Inner Asia--its tripartite

subdivision notwithstanding--includes also a great variety of common features, ranging from the fine arts and poetry to technological peculiarities.

The frontier of Inner Asia is unstable; it varies from age to age, from area to area following the balance of pressure between the civilized and the uncivilized. The Roman province of Pannonia, the Greek provinces of Asia Minor become "Inner Asia" when occupied respectively by the Huns (5th C. A.D.) or by the Seljuk Turks (11th C. A.D.). Northern China becomes "Inner Asia" wehn occupied by the Kitan, the Jurchen, the Mongols, or the Manchus. The pattern and the length of assimilation, absorption, or outright annihilation varied from case to case. In the course of history the assimilation of Inner Asian peoples--the barbarians--has seldom been done by force. This may seem strange to the western man of the 20th century, vaguely familiar with the history of the white man's conquest, or attempted conquest, of the "natives," the "primitive," the "uncivilized." This pattern does not fit the history of Inner Asia. Assimilation by conquest is hardly ever found, the only important example being the Russian occupation of most of the lands

that remained within the boundaries of Inner Asia in the modern epoch.

Although the area of Inner Asia is subject to fluctuations, the general trend is that of diminution. With the territorial growth of the sedentary civilizations, their borderline extends and offers a larger surface on which new layers of barbarians will be deposited. The diminution in space of Inner Asia thus follows the pattern of geometric progression; as time goes on, the process of assimilation becomes more and more rapid, in the sense that more and more barbarians can be assimilated within the same span of time.

The barrier that over the centuries has separated the peoples of Inner Asia from those of the surrounding sedentary civilizations is cultural rather than political. It stands in the hearts of men rather than on the ground. It is not dissimilar to the chasm separating the haves from the have-nots, the chosen people from the philistines.

The term "barbarian" has repeatedly been used on the preceding pages. In its earliest, Greek, application it simply meant "foreigner." Later, it denoted successively the non-Hellene, the non-Roman, the non-Byzantine, the non-Christian, and even the non-Italian. In spite of

numerous secondary applications and even misapplications of the word, it is quite clear that in its principal meaning--in which it is used here--the term is the antonym of "civilized" and is, therefore, for all practical purposes synonymous with "uncivilized." Civilized-uncivilized are relative terms. Those who consider themselves civilized are those who are, or consider themselves, endowed with privileges which they intend to protect against those who do not have, and therefore covet them. In the normal pattern of events those who have not and are on the "outside" (a term often used in Chinese sources) attack; those who have and are on the inside resist. But only the center of the civilized world is forbidden to the barbarian. He can, if he wishes, have access to the periphery and form a marginal group in the hope of being assimilated ultimately into the core. On the edges of civilization a regular deposit of barbarian layers increases constantly the area of the civilized world and in the same process forms a protective reef around the initial centers. Thus it is more appropriate to speak of the "conversion" of the barbarian rather than of his conquest or assimilation. Most of the time it is a deliberate political act, a request for admittance, for asylum, one would almost say, that

precedes the process of assimilation, which is all the more rapid since it is initiated by the barbarian himself.

It is interesting to remark that in historical times few barbarian layers coming from Inner Asia were added to the core we call Europe. Except for the Russian expansion in Asia, since Roman times the western world has shrunk rather than expanded. The white man has assimilated practically no one: he went out and conquered virtually empty lands such as America and Australia where he exterminated the not too numerous natives. Whenever and wherever he met with an established, sedentary civilization, his methods of conquest yielded but short-term results and ended, or are ending, in shameful retreat. On the western boundary of Inner Asia only the Hungarians and the Bulgars settled down, whereas countless peoples asked and received "admittance" (a technical term used by the Chinese) into China. It is not suggested that over the centuries the Chinese did not conquer by force many neighboring peoples, but the facts worth meditating on show that many of the conquered were not exterminated, but were given a fair chance to become Chinese.

On several occasions not only the conquered but also

the conquerors "converted" to Chinese culture. It is important to remember that during our era five dynasties of Inner Asian origin ruled over China for a total of 950 years, and that the last of these, the Manchu Ch'ing dynasty, ceased to reign as late as 1911. They have all become sinicized. The barbarian tempted by the inducements of the civilized world, when faced with the choice, often prefers to lose his identity rather than to return to his former condition. Some of the Uighurs, who in the 8th and 9th century formed a powerful nomad empire in Mongolia, when driven out, settled in the Chinese province of Kansu. Less than a hundred years later, they politely declined an offer from the first Liao emperor--himself a not yet converted barbarian--to reinstate them in their former empire.

If then we try to define the dominant trait of Inner Asia as a cultural and historical entity we find that it is essentially determined by economic factors resulting from the geographic and climatic fundamentals of the region.

The economy of pastoral nomadism is extensive and necessitates the relative dispersal of the population engaged in it. The number of horses that a square mile of steppe can support is strictly limited. For every given year there was an optimum number of horses the grazing land under the control of one given political power could

raise or support. The internal demand for horses had only a limited elasticity and the saturation of the home market was easily achieved. There was no direct advantage to be had through the unlimited increase of horse herds, unless the surplus horses could be used to obtain goods not produced within the Inner Asian pastoral economic system. In order to remain self-sufficient on a subsistence level, the Inner Asian pastoralists had to remain dispersed. If for political or economic reasons--such as the desire to obtain goods not produced by themselves--the pastoralists decided to create a strong, centralized state of some dimension, the pasture could no longer provide for the resulting increased density of their herds. Overgrazing quickly reduced the carrying capacity of the range. Because of its non-diversified economy the new steppe-state either had to export the animal surplus so as to reduce the herds to a size commensurate with the grazing grounds occupied, or it had to make use of the war potential created by the surplus in horses. An Inner Asian nomad empire could be compared to a hypothetical modern country whose entire industrial output consists of tanks. Such a country could ensure its continued existence only by either exporting them or by using these

tanks to obtain by force the goods not produced by its own economy. While a horse is more versatile than a tank and its uses are more diversified, beyond a relatively low optimum number horses cannot be profitably employed within the producing state. If the possibilities of trade were insufficient and success in war eluded the leaders, the steppe nation had to disband in order to ensure the survival of the individual. The concentration of horses necessary for large-scale operations could not be maintained in conditions of peace, but scattered groups of horse breeders could always subsist on what the pastures and the woods had to offer.

The political weakness of historical Inner Asia lay in the fact that in the pre-modern age its production could neither be diversified nor increased and that the most important single commodity it produced, the horse, lost most of its "value in exchange." In spite of the political decadence into which Inner Asia had sunk and which resulted in the bulk of its territory being incorporated into the Russian empire, early in the 20th century a British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, recognized its great political importance. He called the core of Inner Asia "the geographical pivot of history," the "heartland." [2] For him rule over this heartland was

[2] "The Geographical Pivot of History," The Geographical Journal 23 (1904), 421-437.

tantamount to domination over Eurasia.

While one is bound to disagree with many of Mackinder's conclusions, he was right in recognizing the capital significance of the area for world history. The fact that it is almost completely landlocked is of no great consequence in an age in which the importance of sea-borne power has almost completely vanished. In the present age Inner Asia, unified by the use of a common Cyrillic script, almost in its entirety under a strong, centralized leadership, may be compared to a citadel in danger of beleagerment. Its enemies, if in agreement, may attack it simultaneously. But at the same time its defenders, from their central position, may make devastating sorties taking advantage both of their natural strength and of the relative shortness of their lines of communication. Perhaps one might agree with the statement made by D.F. Fleming, that "the communization of the vast heart of Eurasia, the world's largest island, is the towering political fact of the twentieth century."[3]

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[3] The Cold War and its Origins, 1917-1960, I-II. (Doubleday and Co., 1961), II, p. 1035.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

This teaching aid leans heavily on some publications by Denis Sinor and incorporates verbatim quotations from, among others, "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," Oriens Extremus 19 (1972), pp. 171-183, and "Inner Asia--Central Eurasia," Indo Asia. Vierteljahreshefte für Politik, Kultur und Wirtschaft Indiens, Heft 3, 1974, pp. 214-222.

Among the general histories of Inner Asia, René Grousset, The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia, (Rutgers University Press, 1970) is still the most inspiring. Originally published in French in 1939, it is outdated and has no bibliographical references to speak of. The not always accurate spellings of proper names of the original edition were further distorted in the translation. In this respect the book is completely unreliable and if it remains at the head of this list, it is because no other work has the same penetrating vision of Inner Asian history.

The handiest beginner's book on Inner Asia now available is Gavin Hambly (Editor), Central Asia, vol. XVI of Delacorte World History, (New York, Delacorte Press, 1969).

It is readable, although uninspired, has no concept of its own and is little more than a collection of chapters written by different authors who do not seem to have consulted each other. Yet the book has much to commend itself. On the whole it is accurate, it has a short, not annotated bibliography and it can be relied on for the topics it discusses. Its coverage of Inner Asian history is far from complete.

Neither of the above-mentioned books can be recommended for class use in courses not specializing in Inner Asian history. The instructor might use some chapters for recommended reading.

E.H. Parker, A Thousand Years of the Tartars, (1895, several recent reprints) and M.A. Czaplicka, The Turks of Central Asia in History and at the Present, (1918, several reprints) should be avoided. William Montgomery McGovern, The Early Empires of Central Asia, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1939) is just a shade better.

Stuart Legg, The Heartland, (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1971) is a book of popularization not without merit which lays no claim to scholarship. Yet it is a pleasing evocation of much of Inner Asia's past and its easy style makes it suitable for recommended reading.

Denis Sinor, Inner Asia. History--Civilization--Languages. A Syllabus, (Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series vol. 96, second, revised edition 1971), is an oversized syllabus for American college teach-

ing. It contains some basic, critical bibliographic references and it is probably useful for the instructor. It is far too short to be used for recommended reading. The book contains some annotated bibliographical references and deals at some length, with various aspects of Inner Asian civilization and with the contemporary political organization of the region.

On the basic characteristics of Inner Asia, present or past, the seminal works of Owen Lattimore must be highly commended. More specifically: Inner Asian Frontiers of China, (New York, American Geographical Society, 1940; paperback: Beacon, 1962), and Studies in Frontier History. Collected Papers 1929-1958, (Oxford University Press, 1962). Many of Lattimore's articles make excellent assigned readings.

Denis Sinor (Editor), Orientalism and History, (second, revised edition, Indiana University Press, 1970) has a chapter on "Central Eurasia" written by the editor, which gives a somewhat elaborate definition of Inner Asia and some bibliographical references.

On the natural regions of Inner Asia much valuable material will be found in books dealing with the Soviet Union, such as: Lev Berg, Natural Regions of the U.S.S.R., translated from the Russian, New York, Macmillan, 1950), Norton Ginsburg (Editor), The Pattern of Asia, (Englewood

Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1958); W.H. Parker, An Historical Geography of Russia, (Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co., 1969).

A detailed bibliographical guide to all aspects of Inner Asian studies, present or past, is Denis Sinor, Introduction à l'étude de l'Eurasie Centrale, (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1963). The more recent literature is surveyed in Denis Sinor, "Notes on Inner Asian Historiography, I", Journal of Asian History 7(1973), pp. 178-206, to be continued probably in vol. 9 (1975) and further volumes of the same periodical.

This short list of books is certainly not exhaustive but it should be emphasized that the literature written in English and dealing with Inner Asia is woefully inadequate. The series of Teaching Aids which begins with the present essay will endeavor to bring some remedy to the situation but will not resolve the basic problem: what to give to the students for reading assignments. At this stage the only sound advice that can be given to instructors is to put together their own classroom reader by culling from books and periodicals the passages relevant to the topic of their interest. It should also be borne in mind that this Teaching Aid deals only with the general characteristics of Inner Asia. Not

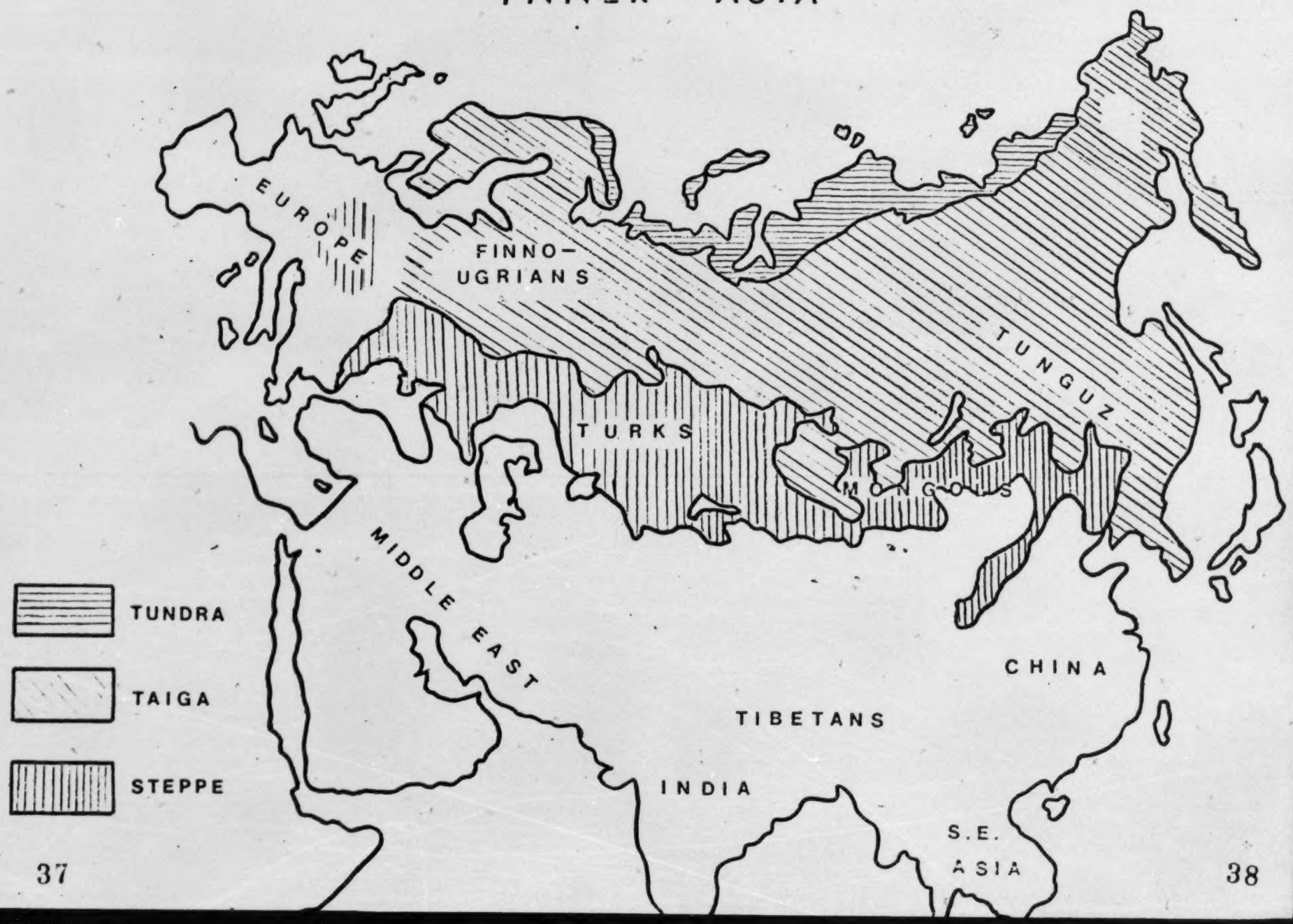
every aspect of Inner Asian studies is equally retarded and future pamphlets in this series dealing with specific questions, will be able to offer substantial help.

Those interested in Inner Asia are faced with an added problem. Most of the college book stores are unable to cope with book orders that lie outside their usual routine, particularly in view of the fact that most of the relevant literature appears in languages other than English. The following specialist book stores might render great services:

Ad Orientem. 2, Cumberland Gardens, St. Leonards, Sussex, England.
Blackwell's, Broad Street, Oxford, England
E.J. Brill, Oude Rijn, Leiden, Holland
Otto Harrassowitz, 6200 Wiesbaden, Postfach 349, Germany
W. Heffer and Sons, 20 Trinity Street, Cambridge, England
Adrien Maisonneuve, 11, rue Saint-Sulpice, 75006 Paris, France

German and French books are best ordered from, respectively, Harrasowitz and Maisonneuve. Many "American" books are first published in England and, in spite of postage, are cheaper when ordered through an English bookseller. A book that is out of print in the U.S. may well be available from stock through one of these bookshops.

The Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series (in which Sinor, Inner Asia was published), consists of well over one hundred volumes, many of which deal with Inner Asia. The publisher is not the Indiana University Press, and orders or enquiries should be sent to Research Center for the Language Sciences, 516 East 6th Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.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